
Seating at the seams in 2019

By **Sabrina Pirillo** on | Seating



This is a special feature from *PAX Tech's April Aircraft Interiors Expo Hamburg 2020 edition*.

Outside forces and industry trends were driving the direction and the attention of the aircraft seating market at the start of the year.

Seating companies contacted by *PAX Tech* were watching developments in the long-range narrow body market, while developing products that will stand up to ever-present environmental scrutiny that has become commonplace. At the same time, the ramifications of the coronavirus outbreak were still being considered along with the future of the 737 MAX.

Nonetheless, development is moving ahead, and this year's Passenger Experience Week promises some new seating products and improvements to existing lines.

Acro Aircraft Seating



Acro Aircraft Seating seats has a sleek and modern aesthetic

[Acro Aircraft Seating](#) has seen considerable global business growth in the past year. The low-cost

market has always been important for Acro, from its first customer, Jet2, to Mango Airlines, Spirit Airlines, Allegiant Air, Frontier Airlines and more recently Spring Airlines in China. Acro has continued to expand its business with low-cost carriers with the Series 3 family of seats and the launch of the Series 6LC at AIX Hamburg last year, which is the next-generation product aimed at low-cost carriers.

“As a result of our continued investment in new product development and a broader product range, we have also been attracting the attention of flag carriers with our Series 6 Economy Class and Series 7 Premium Economy/Domestic First Class seats,” Jenny Carlino, General Manager of Sales, Europe at Acro tells *PAX Tech*. “Our philosophy, which puts passenger comfort at the heart of what we do, resonates with full-service carriers who are looking to differentiate their products.”

Series 6 incorporates the company’s innovative “extra-spatial” design. The fully composite seatback curve provides more living space at knee level and two inches of extra leg room. The seat was first selected by [Air New Zealand](#) in 2017 followed by [Etihad Airways](#) last year.

Acro also initiated additional production capabilities in China under existing Acro EASA Part 21 and AS9100D quality accreditation approvals. The 50,000 square-meter facility in Shanghai will make it possible for Acro to service Asia’s retrofit market with line-fit programs to follow later.

Strengthening its aftermarket capability by gaining Part 145 maintenance organization approvals accreditation will enable Acro to perform maintenance and repair services both on and off wing. The company can then provide a comprehensive end-to-end service for its airline and leasing company customers with a cost-effective repair option.

In April 2019, Etihad announced that it had selected Acro’s Series 6 Economy Class seat for an upgrade program on its A320/321 fleet, which are used for service within five hours of flight from Abu Dhabi.

Acro worked with Etihad to develop a customized version of the seat that includes upper and lower literature pockets, fast-charging USB provisioning, bespoke fabric seat covers, a headrest and backrest cushions.

Another big announcement was [Spirit Airlines](#) becoming the launch customer for Acro’s Series 6LC Economy Class seat.

Spirit President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ted Christie, unveiled the Series 6LC seats on stage during his “Invest in the Guest” keynote speech at the APEX Expo in Los Angeles last September. The cabin redesign is part of the airline’s commitment to improve the passenger experience. The Series 6LC will be on 40 line-fit and 43 retrofit A320 aircraft. First deliveries and installations began at the end of last year.

Acro and Spirit’s relationship began in 2014 when the airline first carried the Series 3 seat. Then in 2015, Airbus became Acro’s first line-fit customer through Spirit.

“Spirit is a long-standing customer of Acro’s and we are extremely proud that they are our first Series 6LC customer,” says Marc Westcott, Acro Key Account Manager, USA. “This launch event was the culmination of an intensive 15-month program, whereby both teams at Spirit and Acro have worked in close collaboration to achieve an industry-leading Economy Class product which has been endorsed by leading ergonomics experts.”

As Spirit continues to grow and evolve its brand, Acro works hard to keep in stride with the airline’s updated requirements for its seating platform. Initial discussions on the Series 6LC seat started in 2018 and highlighted the perks: increased legroom and useable space, a large sliding meal tray,

additional width for the middle seat, a memory foam layer on the cushion and improved pre-recline angle.

Acro's Series 6LC Economy Class seats on Spirit have a sleek and modern aesthetic with soft touch matte black synthetic leather upholstery and contract border stitching in the airline's signature yellow. Other seat features include an upper literature pocket, a sliding single-leaf table with cup recess, thicker cushioning and lumbar support, and a pre-reclined seatback. The middle seat is an inch wider and the exit row gains more than an inch of pre-recline.

In other product range expansions, Acro is launching two seating products designed specifically for twin-aisle aircraft. With Acro moving into the wide-body market, it's keeping product details under wraps until the unveiling at AIX Hamburg.

Acro is showcasing its narrow-body product range at AIX, including the next generation Series 6LC Economy Class seat (the seat selected by Spirit Airlines), the award-winning Series 3 Economy Class seating family, the extra-spatial Series 6 Economy Class seat (in service on Etihad and Air New Zealand) and Series 7 Business Class/Premium Economy seat.

This year, the company will also focus on emphasizing sustainably produced materials and exploring new techniques to achieve greener cabin products.

HAECO



The Vector Light by HAECO

[HAECO](#) will be unveiling its newest seating product, “Vector Light” at the Aircraft Interiors Expo in Hamburg at the end of March. This iteration of Vector is specifically designed to optimize living space without sacrificing comfort, all at the most competitive weight of any fully featured seat.

“Vector Light will simply make slimline seats obsolete, with the comfort level achieved at only 28 inches of pitch,” David Kelly, Vice President of Marketing and Strategy for HAECO Americas tells *PAX*.

The largest success story for HAECO continues to be publicly announcing the Vector product with [Cathay Pacific](#) on its A350-1000 fleet. Although the program was announced a few years ago, HAECO continues to deliver line-fit shipsets to Airbus. This credibility led HAECO to win additional programs with other large, Tier 1 airlines, which would not have made its roster a few years ago. HAECO’s largest market shares are on the A350 and 787 with continued expansion to its “catalog-offerability” for line-fit and retrofit programs, performing cabin and seat installations, and offering maintenance, repair and overhaul work.

Kelly says the industry has experience quite a long run of airline profitability and growing traffic. “We are now being faced with two exogenous events pressuring the industry, where by AIX in Hamburg, the industry will know more about the coronavirus and how long-lasting the impacts will be,” he says. Kelly is also hopeful to know more about the timing of the 737 MAX recovery.

Aviointeriors



Aviointeriors' production facility located in Latina, Italy

[Aviointeriors](#) has always had a strong presence in the retrofit market when it comes to seating in both Economy and First Class, as well as servicing new customers in regions such as the Middle East and Africa.

In the past year, Aviointeriors has been first in line as line-fit provider during aircraft production, Aviointeriors CEO Paolo Drago tells *PAX Tech*. The company is currently in the supplier certification process, which should be finalized by the end of next year.

One of the main long-time contracts for Aviointeriors is [Icelandair](#). The flag carrier, headquartered near the capital city of Reykjavik, equips its 757, 767 and 737 MAX fleet with Aviointeriors' Business and Economy Class seats.

Two products that Aviointeriors will highlight in Hamburg are for Business and Economy Class. The first Business Class launch features a full flat seat that transforms into a bed for long-haul flights of about eight to 10 hours. This seat is for single-aisle aircraft, such as the A320 and 737. The other is Aviointeriors' Economy seat that combines material and technology to deliver a low-weight per passenger seat.

Drago says that to predict where the seating industry is headed, it must be first gain a better understanding of the 737 MAX and its market repositioning. “The industry is suffering due to lack of capacity for finding a replacement to service these routes,” he says. “We’ve seen shrinkage in terms of market volumes and I think as an industry, we need to work on the future and evolution of long-haul flights.”

Geven



The Elemento by Geven is designed to provide more living space in reduced confines of pitch and has a video screen, cup holder, eyeglass holder, literature pockets, personal electronic device holders and reading lights

Last year saw [Geven](#) consolidate the Economy Class seats market for single aisle aircraft. [Wizz Air](#) selected the company's [Essenza](#) seat, and so did [Lufthansa Group](#) for its A320/A321 aircraft for Lufthansa, [Swiss International Air Lines](#) and [Austrian Airlines](#).

Geven Marketing and Sales Manager Rodolfo Baldascino tells *PAX Tech* the supplier has already delivered several shipsets to Lufthansa and the demand is only growing. "The seat completed its EIS period successfully with Lufthansa and this was a very important task to be achieved. We have seen the customer list for the [Essenza](#) growing day-by-day."

In addition to its contracts with Wizz Air and Lufthansa Group, Geven's Boeing seats also became available for line-fit in early-2019. Geven seats already fly on several [Boeing](#) aircraft, but until recently, only for retrofit projects.

"This is a great addition to the Geven portfolio. It opens a new and wider market for the company," Baldascino explains.

Geven also dedicated 2019 to fine-tuning its new Economy Class seat for long-range, the Elemento, which will be presented at AIX Hamburg. The seat is designed to provide more living space in reduced confines of pitch, including a super light but functional cradle option. The seat also features a large

video screen, cup holder, eyeglass holder, customized literature pockets and universal use, personal electronic device holders and reading lights.

“Long-haul travel has evolved into new and more demanding needs, dictated by fierce fare competition, which in turn, calls for more seats in less,” reads the press release for the Elemento seat.

When asked where Geven see’s the industry heading in 2020, Baldascino says, it’s hard to say. The biggest demand in the last two years from the industry and passengers, he says, is the request for less weight and more comfort at tighter pitches. The demand has shifted now, to long-haul seats for single-aisle aircraft.

“This is a new category of products as the long-range Premium Economy was born just a few years ago,” Baldascino says. It will add complexity and be more challenging to develop and certify because suppliers will be expected to offer the same comfort as a long-range wide-body seat at the weight and price of an economy seat for short-haul. “That is a completely different product,” he says. “Here at Geven, we are prepared and already have solutions to meet customer demand for this new type of seat.”